United Nations E/CN.5/2011/NGO/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 December 2010

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Forty-ninth session
9-18 February 2011
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2011/1.

10-66386 (E) 281210

Please recycle

Statement

1. Poverty is more than a lack of financial resources. It is a serious threat to health, well-being and dignity. It isolates and marginalizes and is a challenge to human rights. For those living in poverty, it can present an impenetrable barrier to participating fully in society. Those who live in poverty struggle to preserve their dignity. They are often unrecognized and their voices remain unheard.

2. In 2001, the Council recognized that human suffering and defined poverty as a "sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights" (see E/C.12/2001/10, para. 8). The definition was echoed in article 5 of the Political Declaration adopted by the Governments attending the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in April 2002.

3. How do older people become impoverished? Some people are born into poverty and, because of lack of education or training opportunities, never emerge. Others become impoverished through a variety of factors. In developed countries, the loss of employment and health care can lead to poverty. In developing countries, where few programmes offering income security exist, the economic situation of older persons becomes exacerbated by weakened family support, particularly when it is undermined by disease, war and civil strife and emigration. Regrettably, there is no worldwide database on the number of older people living in poverty.

4. Despite the lack of data, it is known and accepted that poverty among older persons mainly affects women, minority groups and the disabled. It is also important to recognize that poverty among the elderly is a worldwide phenomenon, existing in industrialized as well as developing countries. For example, in New York City, more than one in five persons aged 60 and over lives in poverty. Such information is only available for a limited number of cities and nations. Therefore, in order to address the issue of poverty in general, it is critical that mechanisms be developed to obtain data that can be disaggregated by age and gender. The organization views that action as essential in order to measure the existence of poverty among subgroups within a country's population, including the elderly. Only with such data can good and appropriate policies and programmes be developed to benefit those in need.

5. There are many different policies and programmes that can begin to address the issue of poverty among the elderly. At the international level, policies and programmes directed at development and poverty eradication must acknowledge the substantial and growing population and diversity of older persons and, in so doing, ensure that the subpopulation does not go unnoticed, but rather benefits from these efforts. At the national level, the creation of income security programmes, if they do not exist, should be the goal. Where such programmes are not feasible, the equal access of older persons to employment and income-generating opportunities should be promoted. The particular needs of older women, the very oldest and those with disabilities and chronic conditions should be specifically addressed in poverty-eradication strategies and programmes.

6. In conclusion, if all older people, including those in poverty, are to participate fully in their societies, they must have a standard of living that empowers them. Achieving that goal requires political will on the part of Governments and awareness-building among all stakeholders, including both Governments and civil society.

7. A true partnership can be created to bring that goal to fruition in the foreseeable future.

10-66386